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WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Preparatory Committee
Fourth session
Geneva, 19-30 April 1993
Agenda item 6

REPORT ON OTHER MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Contribution submitted by the Arab Organization for Human Rights

The attention of the Preparatory Committee is drawn to the attached summary of the outcome and recommendations of the Arab Conference on Human Rights, held in Cairo, 10-12 April 1993.

GE.93-12849

Arab Conference on Human Rights In Preparation for the World Conference Cairo: April 10 - 12, 1993

The Coordinating Committee of Arab Non-governmental Organizations in Preparation for the World Conference on Human Rights, established by the Arab Organization for Human Rights, the Arab Lawyers Union and the Arab Institute for Human Rights, organized a regional conference on human rights in Cairo from the 10th to the 12th of April, 1993, to prepare for the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna 1993. Over 140 delegates attended the conference, representing 60 Arab human rights non-governmental organizations, in addition to national and regional trade and professional unions involved in the human rights field, and other Arab inter-governmental organizations. Observers to the Conference included those representing the United Nations and its specialised agencies, other international non-governmental organizations involved in the region, and the Arab Committee on Human Rights of the League of Arab States.

The Conference reviewed the activities of the preparatory process for the World Conference on Human Rights, from the regional and international perspectives, in addition to the efforts of Arab Governments and that of Arab non-governmental organizations. It also examined the activities of the Preparatory Committee Meetings for the World Conference on Human Rights, being held in Geneva, within the same context. Its review of the international preparatory process, as well as that of the Preparatory meetings was very positive. However, it expressed concern at the absence of certain issues from the agenda which are of central importance to the Arab people, particularly the right to self-determination and the illegality of the foreign occupation of land. These represent some of the main issues being discussed in the Arab countries and are of central importance to the human rights cause there, in addition to forming the foundations of the United Nations in general, and that of its bodies which deal in human rights, in particular.

The Arab Conference on Human Rights also expressed concern at the manner in which the Asian countries stressed the regional particularities of culture and that of national sovereignty in relation to the universal applicability of human rights, as stated in the Declaration issued at the end of the Asia Regional Meeting in Bangkok in preparation for the World Conference on Human Rights. It was noted that several countries have used this "excuse" to circumvent international scrutiny of their application of the various international instruments that deal

with basic rights and freedoms. On the other hand, the Conference emphasized its support of the regional particularities of culture and national sovereignty if they serve to promote human rights and increase their respect, however, it opposed such approaches if they were used to negate fundamental human rights or lead to their abrogation. In addition, it stressed the link between civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights, and that between development and democracy and human rights.

The Conference also noted that the obstacles to the promotion and protection of human rights in the region are being reinforced due to the weak relationship that exists between the various legal and constitutional frameworks in the Arab countries and the International Bill of Human Rights. This has also been brought about because of: the practical absence of constitutional and other legal guarantees due to the imposition of emergency measures in some countries of the region; the limitations placed on political freedoms; the weakening of the right of parliamentary, media, and the societies civil institutions to monitor national developments; the lack of respect of the law and other international instruments; and finally, the continuing discrimination against women in some Arab conventions, and within the social framework in general.

The Arab Conference on Human Rights urged Arab governments to ratify the various international conventions and to eliminate any obstacles preventing their respect in full. It also stressed that special attention be given to the respect and promotion of women and minority rights, including that of national rights. In addition, it underlined the need to place added importance on the respect of the rights of expatriate and other workers, and the resolution of problems relating to prisoners of war, the missing, the disappeared and refugees which have resulted from armed conflicts in the area.

In addition, the Conference was dismayed at the apparent dual attitude in which the international community is dealing with the various problems of the area, and particularly in its treatment of the Palestinian question. It has been noted that this attitude became clear through inaction of the international community in the face of the continued Israeli violation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions. The Arab Conference called for the provision of legal safeguards for the protection of the Palestinian people, including those provided by the Fourth Geneva Convention, relative to civilians in times of war, and the study of the possibility of creating an international instrument for the purpose of protecting civilians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It also stressed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

Finally, the Conference discussed ways in which the various international instruments could be reinforced to achieve greater respect and promotion of human rights. Within this context, obstacles to the promotion of the various conventions and covenants was discussed. This also included a detailed examination of the weakness of coordination between the instruments which are already in force, the lack of financial

means and the infrequency of the meetings of United Nations bodies, and the lack of evolution of the United Nations mechanisms to face the challenges of the changing international system. As a result, it has adopted the following suggestions:

1- Promotion of the existing mechanisms:
The Conference suggested that the treaty monitoring bodies which are overseeing the application of the various conventions be given a role in the study of human rights situations under both the states of emergency, and in cases of gross and consistent violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms are revealed. These reports should be presented to the Security Council before it votes on action in the countries concerned. It also stressed the importance of expanding the budget of these Committees, to facilitate an increase in the frequency of meetings. It also suggested that such meetings should be held in places other than New York or Geneva, to increase public and international awareness of their activities, and of their role in monitoring the application of the various conventions. A probable venue for such meetings could be in countries where the various United Nations Regional Economic and Social commissions are located, since that would help to minimise any extra costs that could result. The Conference also called for the expansion of the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, to include a comprehensive involvement in the rehabilitation of such victims. It was suggested that the Fund could do this directly, or through centres to be established for that purpose. Related to this, the Conference urged that the Optional Protocol to the International Convention Against Torture should be completed and opened for ratification as soon as possible.

2- Promotion of New Mechanisms:
The Arab Conference on Human Rights supported the initiative to appoint a Special Rapporteur whose mandate would include rapid intervention in cases where serious and systematic human rights violations are revealed. It also endorsed the proposal of establishing an International War Crimes Tribunal, whose mandate would include the reviewing of cases of gross violations of human rights. In addition, it endorsed the initiative to prepare an international convention whose role would be to place strict guidelines, and monitor elections to ensure their freedom and integrity.

3- Establishment of international instruments on issues that have not been included in the existing mechanisms:
The conference supported the establishment of instruments to deal with issues not yet covered by the existing mechanisms, including the right to peace and the right to a clean environment. In addition, it regarded the establishment of a mechanism to monitor the actions of non-governmental forces who are committing serious violations of human rights, based on article 5 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as necessary. Finally, the Arab Conference on Human Rights supported the fight for the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on religion or belief, and the proposed the establishment of an instrument to be based on the 1981 U.N. Declaration on this issue.